

Public Information and Involvement

Public participation in the Department of Energy's (DOE) nuclear weapons complex has been evolving and is ever more important given today's state of affairs. Major changes in SRS missions—whether to permanently suspend Consolidated Incineration Facility (CIF), whether to disassemble and stabilize surplus weapons components, how to stabilize or dispose of excess plutonium—have all been substantial issues to face.

Decisions made by DOE are now being made with stakeholder involvement throughout the process. In fact, DOE's stated policy is that better decisions result when stakeholders contribute, and that the Department will go beyond the minimum legal requirements to provide greater opportunities for public involvement. As a facility within the DOE complex, the Savannah River Site (SRS) generates public interest in site activities. To keep the public informed and to encourage participation in decision-making, SRS offers numerous public information and involvement opportunities.

Public Comment Opportunities

SRS tries to stay in close touch with its neighbors and other interested parties. Its mission requires work in extremely complicated technical fields, and also entails working with hazardous and radioactive materials. , SRS has been able to inform citizens more completely about activities on the Site, seek their opinions about policies and programs, and help address concerns they may have about Site activities.

Several basic public involvement steps are written into law.

- The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), in most cases, calls for informational public meetings and solicitation of written and oral comments on pertinent draft documents.
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires public scoping meetings, hearings, and public comment periods during the development of an Environmental Impact Statement.
- The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) requests written and oral comments on proposed changes to the site's hazardous waste permit, and a public meeting may be held at the request of citizens.

But SRS strives to go beyond these minimum requirements and make it easy for people to contribute their thoughts to DOE decision-making. In addition to the avenues described below, members of the public may make any comments or ask any questions they wish through the SRS Home Page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.srs.gov>.

Public Meetings and Workshops

- When the topics are unusually complex or present unusual issues, DOE may conduct workshops or open houses. Workshops are designed to allow those citizens who have special interests in a particular activity to engage in in-depth discussions with SRS representatives.
- Public meetings are conducted to provide information and receive public input on new programs or issue-related topics. The intent of the meetings and workshops is to provide an opportunity for early, meaningful public involvement.
- SRS has established a Citizens Advisory Board to provide informed recommendations and advice to DOE, the Environmental Protection Agency and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control regarding environmental restoration, waste management, nuclear material management and related SRS issues.
- Public officials are also kept abreast of site activities through timely responses to questions and requests for information, notifications of significant findings, briefings and tours.
- As security levels dictate, SRS's public tour program is another opportunity for people to both learn more about the site first-hand and to offer comments and opinions on a wide variety of programs.

Written Materials

- A broad range of written materials is used to keep people informed, both directly and through the media. Every effort is made to interpret technical information in an understandable form.
- The *SRS Environmental Bulletin* is a newsletter covering various environmental topics, including proposed changes to the site's RCRA hazardous waste permit, dates for public participation opportunities, schedules for NEPA activities, and a wide variety of stories on environmental cleanup and waste management. It is published as needed.
- Fact sheets are used to provide additional information on specific topics.
- Major actions, public meetings and public comment periods are announced to the media through news releases.
- Two types of newspaper advertising — legal notices and display advertising — are also used. Display advertising is used to announce public meetings and workshops of more general interest, or that deal with unusual issues, and that go beyond the requirements of law. Legal notices, required by some environmental laws, announce public meetings and comment periods and proposed changes to the site's RCRA Hazardous Waste Permit.

A mailing list has been developed, which consists of citizens who have shown an interest in site activities, as well as contiguous landholders, public officials, environmental groups and the Site employee population. Information is distributed by hard copy and electronic mail. This list is frequently used to relay information about site actions or upcoming public meetings.

- The Site also advertises meetings and makes advance material available through the internet.

Information Centers

- A Freedom of Information Public Reading Room is located in the University of South Carolina library in Aiken. It contains SRS cleanup and compliance documents required by environmental laws, in addition to background information on the site and its environmental activities.
- Documents such as the *Savannah River Site Federal Facility Agreement*, the *SRS Community Relations Plan*, and others are housed there, along with reference materials, such as newsletters and fact sheets.
- Each cleanup and compliance document on which the public has been invited to provide comment is available, as are responses to comments.
- The documents upon which EPA and SCDHEC base their selections of cleanup actions at SRS waste sites are available on microfilm.
- Many of the same documents are also available in the Augusta State University library, the Savannah State College library and the USC-Columbia library.
- Information on public participation opportunities can be found on the SRS Home Page (<http://www.srs.gov>), on the Environmental Restoration Home Page, the National Environmental Policy Act (nepa@srs.gov), and the SRS Citizens Advisory Board Home Page.
- Toll-free telephone numbers are available. National Environmental Policy Act – 1-800-881-7292 and SRS Citizens Advisory Board – 1-800-249-8155.

Spokespersons

DOE and the Westinghouse Savannah River Company (WSRC) have designated spokespersons to answer questions and provide written materials and schedules of public involvement opportunities. Please contact Will Callicott, Westinghouse Savannah River Company, Building 705-A, Aiken, SC 29808, (803) 725-0193; or Becky Craft, DOE-SR Office of External Affairs, (803) 725-2889, P.O. Box A, Aiken, S.C. 29802.